





A Monthly Account of the Year
Leading Up to the End of the World,
by Agonistes,
Prophet and Fulfiller

or

The Exhausted Dream



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Joshua Edwards

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Joshua Edwards

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IN TOKEN
OF MY ADMIRATION AND LOVE
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO
Lynn Xu



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FIRST THIRD


*What have you done, O skies,
That the millions should kneel to you?*

— VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE




January 21, 2012






If you have ever returned from a trip
Abroad and found your country completely
Changed, then you know how I have always felt.
I once thought it a simple problem of
Geography, that I was born ten hours
Late, that the globe had spun beneath my soul
Too much, and when I did at last descend,
I animated an American
Instead of a nascent whale or someone
Destined for wealth and greatness overseas.




Later, once I had learned that God is dead
But there is a striving and adaptive
Spirit in all forms of life, I shifted
The blame to history, the ugliest
Story I've ever heard, and one whose gore
I can never seem to turn away from.
I was born too late or too early or
I shouldn't have ever been born at all.
Then I ended up on a sofa and
Learned about Freud and dreams I didn't have.




Although most of it seemed phony, the source
Of my constant discomfort became clear:
The world is made by anxious people, made
In fits and starts when they are without love.
That was and is where I rest my case: love
Itself is good for nothing but killing
Time and the desire to make the future
Into a circumstance to be survived.
What remains if thou lovest nothing well?
If you said *emptiness*, then you are wrong.


Emptiness itself means well when well-wrought,
But love not well-made is its opposite,
Which mind you is not hate, it is revenge.
And so when I looked to the stars and saw
Only the darkness between them, I knew
That our world's time in the heavens should end.
I am building a machine that will bring
A comet into congress with the Earth,
To return the ether to its peaceful
Anonymity, without a subject.



I should be much for open war, as if
My eldest brother were a cosmonaut.
But alas, I have no older brother.
In fact, I am a space cadet myself.
I am the world's only real astronaut,
I am always moving farther away.
I was born an orphan and do become
More of an orphan as I grow older.
All my years I've spent in this place, alone
But for those who made me eat my carrots.




From their kitchen I've heard morality
Cry out as its contradictions collapse
Upon mankind, we who used it against
One another in our arguments and wars.
The belief that death is some cave or hole
Has led us to use life as a weapon.
Only by destroying death's ladder's rungs
Can we bring eternity back to life.
None of us are innocent, and that word
Itself is evil whenever applied.




No, *evil* is not a strong enough word,
For evil has an end, but innocence
Is an endless loop of hurting people.
When you hear someone laughing, is your first
Impulse not to think they're laughing at you?
Defeating the indefensible is
Youth: everyone knows how cruel children are.
Still, it is not cruelty that I loathe.
I do not loathe, I only love, as well
As any other imperfect lover.


But love itself is breaking, as a boy's
Voice breaks under maturity's burdens:
A girl captures his imagination
With her smile, his bicycle seems too small,
And his baseball cards turn into paper.
Once upended, the world is never free.
Still, my love is strong for all waves and groups
Of people, and for them I raise a glass
And toast a way to end our suffering,
A way to end it all without murder.



If your refrigerator crushed you would
You call it a killer with your last breath?
No, you would cry and think of sandwiches.
Such is my plan to bring relief to us.
Heaven will fall upon the Earth, and we
Will be subsumed into the universe.
I have read hundreds of religious texts,
Seven thousand books of philosophy,
And a million pamphlets of poetry.
None of them contains an ounce of wisdom.



They are merely tired lists of arguments,
Digressions on beginnings and endings,
Rules for vanity and birthday parties.
The question that we really want answered
Is what will happen to our precious souls?
Such a question can only be answered
With a sincere apology, and now
Only the sky's violence is sincere.
I see this end in our future, and now
Be the prophet and the fulfiller one.






February 21, 2012




Wrap yourself in a cloak of autumn, see
Evergreens and fog around you, look down
At a trail of blood on the forest floor.
Follow it to a crying child, hands pressed
To forehead, trying to hold pain at bay.
Thenceforth he grew up fearful and forlorn,
Hero of a nasty bildungsroman,
Victim of the forces of conception.
That youth was mine twenty years ago and
My voice is the voice of that little boy.


I was thirteen in 1991.
I had just arrived at the orphanage
From the streets, where at least I'd known my place
And the secret warmth of the ungoverned.
On the outside I had been cared for by
People who lived in a state of merely,
And they guarded me in my blamelessness,
But when I arrived at that place designed
To protect me, I joined a crowd whose minds
Hunted purity and exalted spoil.



Their leader, a giant kid named Doug whose
Teeth were the color of a yellow lab,
Hated the way I spoke: the lively words
I found in books offended his dull ear.
I tried to explain to him how my life
Had mostly been spent in libraries and
Beneath overpasses, that my mind was
A native of the lands in classic tales.
Biography evoked no sympathy.
In fact it probably made my plight worse.




They called me Time Traveler, Chickenshit,
Englishman, and a dozen more mean names.
Following Doug's lead, the children pushed
Me around and made up cruel stories
About the parents I had never had.
As history may be shaped by rumor
And imagination dwells most on loss,
I assembled my legend from their lies
And from stories I had read: my father
Was a count and my mother his mistress.




Despite my books, I had no idea that
While I was getting punched in the stomach,
Children only a few miles away were
Waiting with antique toys on Persian rugs
For postmen to bring them puzzles from France.
Had I known, I would have broken street lamps
And gnashed my teeth at all opulent things.
My tormenters were me plus the knowledge
That our lots in life were shit, and I'm sure,
In their place I'd have hit the new boy too.


A ghost is vacancy and weakness wrapped
Around an outlook of uncertainty.
The poor are born as ghosts, invisible
As a third estate from a high tower,
Unseen until they approach the castle
With torches lit and anger in their eyes.
How much blood has been shed for the pleasure
Of an embroidered towel or the crude
Comfort of an ottoman by a hearth?
At the thought of such things I clench my jaw.



On top of badgering by those youngsters,
I suffered the joyless nuns' attention
And lived in fear of their dark afterlives,
Fearing also blood, wine, flesh, and demons
That could enter my heart if I misspoke.
To sin is to lie to an emperor
Upon whose silver platter the future
Will be served, is what my keepers taught me.
I made of my resentment a great wall
To hold back the sea of their poison schemes.



It would seem by this account that my time
Among devilish children and wives of God
Was brief, but it lasted several dull
And cruel yet unmemorable years,
Until I managed to escape one night
Into the freedom of my prior life
Of discarded food and ambient warmth.
Trains thundered over the quivering bridge
Under which I slept many moonless nights.
The city's stench commingled with my own.



I thought of moving to the countryside,
Where solitude is sweetened by bird songs,
But that's not anarchism, it's camping.
Another time I thought to build an ark
And await the flood I was sure to come.
Yet another I considered moving
Into a cave to contemplate the truth
Until I emerged with all the answers.
Then one day I came into possession
Of a timeworn German dictionary.

In German there is a word for *spirit*
That also means *mind*, and that's the meaning
I chose, since choosing meant to be something,
Or so I thought until I read more books.
Turns out, to be something is to choose it.
The value is in being, not in choice,
And if the value of being is low,
There can be no other choice than to raze
The foundations of all future prisons.
I myself could change the Earth's direction.




March 21, 2012




In this world of parasite mechanics
And waitresses who cannot get a loan
And professors lusting after tenure
And schoolchildren fighting in the schoolyard,
Where is the place for one such as myself,
Who doesn't like to drive, who cannot bring
Himself to tip or even tip a hat,
Whose mind is too flighty for academe,
Whose fight is against the schoolyard itself?
The heart's inquiring vacuum wants to know.


Yes, who am I and wherefore do I rage?
I'm an animal made out of people,
And all I have wanted is to eat well
And to live quietly in a corner
That I might call my own, beyond the great
Archive of voices and knowledge of our
Sad contract of self-annihilation,
But like some creature turned white by winter,
I have become the very essence of
That from which my instincts would have me hide.




I have grown tired of the spirit of yet
And the world of *the world is your oyster*.
I spent years refining my thoughts, writing
Haiku in cuttlefish ink on handmade
Paper, drinking tea traditionally,
And while this is only a metaphor,
It is true that I once cared to measure
Out hope in syllables as delicate
As a child's first haircut, and that my heart
Aspired to beat on though it was broken.




Eventually, I was overwhelmed
By the din of daily interactions.
Only atop mountains do I still find
Joy: it appears there as in a mailbox.
But enough about me, let's talk about
Us and our splendid anonymity.
We are the strangers who will never meet
Although we often amble side by side,
And when we see each other in the street,
We cough or whistle and avert our eyes.






What strange behavior for such similar
Genetic strands ordered in two people's
Greatest moment, at the apex of all
The world's pretension, we remain ciphers
To each other, even unto ourselves.
You and I were built to live with limits,
And well within them we have made our lives.
Even our bodies cannot shake the past.
Take for example our useless sorrows
And all the wonders that we keep private.




Examine our questionable faces,
Weak bodies, awkward gait, inept organs.
It is more than a marvel that we thrive.
Astrology and Marxism have failed
To explain our terrible behavior.
We are far more sinister than the night
Of Capitalism that surrounds us.
We traded freedom for a bag of chips.
Still we are without a doubt the earth's fruit,
Although long ago ripened past our prime.




So we are deranged by our own sweetness.
We have seen ourselves in the suffering
Of Prometheus, Sisyphus, Atlas,
And a myriad of hungry ghosts and
Martyrs damned by who they thought once loved them.
There is no place upon the table for
Flowers until the hungry have been fed.
Let us feast together before we die,
Or at least consider what a word like
Feast must have meant before cholesterol.


In our discrete rooms let us imagine
Our beginnings, when we gathered around
An enormous bonfire and shared the flesh
Of some great animal we could never
Have killed alone with our primitive tools,
When we all stooped over tide pools and laughed
At the shapes of creatures produced therein.
When the clouds above us burst into flame,
Let us think of those antiquated joys
And the time when we knew such selfless needs.



I have heard your lovely voice lilt in song
And seen you skip along the same sidewalk
Your children signed when it was wet cement.
So many summer days have warmed your face
That you don't even notice anymore.
You are my decent and many neighbors,
And it is for your beautiful ideals
That the truth must be destroyed with a kiss.
Is there any better euphemism
For beauty collapsed in one harsh moment?



How can we live knowing that the fireworks
We enjoy on the horizon mean war?
It must all have a better end than this,
An end of onwardness and astonishment.
I have weighed the risks, my reasons are sound,
There is equanimity in my heart.
I have always been drawn to helplessness.
The moon is full on a cold autumn night.
I use such lines of melancholic hue
To stave off my own deep melancholy.





April 21, 2012



Angioplasty is a dirty word
That gleams, mocks, and moans as it embraces
The corpulent heroes of government,
Who want to be Victor Hugo, who want
To reflect the future in power's form.
Despite neoconservative boasting
Or whatever champagne socialists say,
War and wine are the two great loves of man,
Forget about truth, splendor, and gardens.
Any boat with a sail is a sailboat.

It is said that spring is the spring-cleaning
Of the ever-clogging heart of the world,
So it makes sense to me when the Aries
And the Cancers run around half-naked
And press up against each other like palms,
But I am estranged of their zodiac.
I see how self-possessed the sunshine is
And in deference I keep my clothes on.
Unfamiliar with the legends of what
Makes hearts tick, I'd rather write by lamplight.

I would only want to be a member
Of a cult that could thrive without leaders,
And because no such sect exists I find
Myself driving around town late at night.
There is some majesty to being lost
Within the confines of this spectacle.
I breathe in the planet's evolution
And expend its air with petty complaints.
My smallest movements kill tiny creatures.
Though born humble, I was made to destroy.


A destroyer lost in the throes of spring,
I am further estranged by the pollen
That pollutes with its sacred impulses,
By the pataphysics of modern dance,
By the blossoms and bosoms and music
Of hippy Earth's worst patchouli nightmares.
If only the year were three months shorter
And the left-out bit were March-April-May,
I would not know this strange, strong melody
That like personals fill papers fills me.

I am no magician, I have no cave,
There is no stillness to my solitude.
If I could help myself, I would not go
Outside, for it is everywhere: beauty,
Whose skin gathers the sun in many shades,
Who may blush to extend a courtesy,
Who hides Chekov's guns in a tiny purse.
I'm a sick soldier obsessed with my nurse,
I want to heal without getting better.
Peacefulness shines on me when the sun sets.


Libyas of dust, Lebanons of sleep,
And Algerias of decline cover
The tattered maps in my antique bureau.
My contraption resembles a fountain
From which gravity will spew, around which
Darkness will gather, through which I will sing.
Eternal conflict informs its design.
It is like a musical instrument.
It is like an atomic opiate.
It is like a necromancer's crystal.

So vast is the world that no parable
Could do justice to its great confusion.
The foibles of a certain circumspect
Nazarene do not connect with me,
But when I take account of my kismet,
When I make a list of my grievances,
All the beatings taken and crap stepped in,
One image seems a fitting umbrella:
An asteroid bends across the great sky
And its bend is that of apprehension.


As flowers grow on graves each spring, my thoughts
Devolve again, my will supplanted by
The id's seasonal investigations.
I feel as though I were thrust into sport,
As if I woke up and found myself afield,
Compelled by the rules of another world.
I sense cracks in certain walls around me.
I am not an eye, but what surrounds it.
A crystal glass in a secondhand shop,
I dream of wine to dominate my form.



It is tiresome to be always acting
In a different play than all others,
To be a stranger and to bear myself
With an ambiguous disposition.
Having never read any of the Fausts,
I am the member of a special club,
Perched on a cliff, overlooking heaven
In the manner heaven overlooks all.
Degradation seems beautiful from here,
A sea of ice that resembles a grave.



But if Caspar David Friedrich has taught
The world anything, it is that grandeur
And romance can cause fascism and strokes.
More than merely a bad pun on painting
And the loss of a German painter's light,
I mean to say, seriously, that life
Has been ruined by those who study it
In search of compensation for lost time.
Now art and philosophy are no help
As I enter the cold, beautiful sea.





SECOND THIRD


All people are filled with a kind of premonition.

— MIKHAIL BAKUNIN




May 21, 2012







To fuck a god out of the sky one must
Dream of roses blooming in the springtime
Then break a vase upon which is painted
A scene of waning romanitas and
A woman waiting for her past to fade.
Because we think ourselves too far along
There are things that can no longer be made:
Victorian carriages, Fabergé
Eggs, beauty, verbal prophylactic charms.
The future has no thought of balustrades.




Before their voices devolved into streams
Of echolalia and suffering,
A few rich snobs turned poor saints said that if
A man is who he would have others be
Then he may have some power over them.
Thus speaks religion to philosophy,
Philosophy to government, and gods
To preachers, preachers to fathers, fathers
To sons, and sons to mothers, full of love,
Who bear witness and mourn their shameless boys.






My own tears mimic archeology,
As does my desire to possess the past,
As if things were only their adornments:
That vase without the warm blood that filled it,
Vast cathedrals empty in the same way,
And even philosophy's strange questions
Poured out of the earnest skulls that hold them.
Living only for what's gone as I do,
My life is a mnemonic pilgrimage
To a dismantled desert monument.




Moving toward that image, I lose faith
In what an image might return to me.
So I turn away from what I witness,
Like a sailor going blind from the sea.
The best guides descend into some darkness
Before they find a means to treat the light
And follow, past the role of the setting
And rising sun, a way to more obscure
And breathtaking views than the smug grandeur
That the proclaimed names of things would allow.




With a heart the color of bitter wine
Yet still undeformed by grief of knowledge,
I spent many years trapped in the idea
That bridges could be built by promises,
Not knowing that words themselves are too false.
People know less with every word they speak.
Isn't a bridge best appreciated
As it recedes against the great beyond
For a falling hero who has renounced
The hope of a river's splash awaiting?


Traumas of the grave are the cradle's too,
Our lives bookended by these empty thrones.
History rejects all enlightenment,
But the votaries still lay claim to truth
As if it were more than idolatry
And misery would melt with their candles.
The blue sky is supported by mountains,
Heaven is held up by columns of dust.
Do I see enough of what surrounds me?
I am modern but is my tragedy?




My pocket watch grows warm within my fist.
The chain that tethers it to my waistcoat
Hangs between us like the thin leash between
Androcles and his lion as they strolled
Through Roman markets and were showered with
Flowers and money by trembling gawkers.
Sometimes the tick of my watch and the pulse
Of my heart strike at once, and it's as if
Two opposing factions have grown so far
Apart they find themselves on the same side.





How much better to be anonymous
And to hold time, and by holding it hide,
Like a famous actor watching a film
They starred in before they were a star hides
From all aspects of time but hopefulness,
And hope is the philosophy of birth.
What is birth if not the birth of a mouth,
What is life if not vocabulary,
And what is death if not a final word
That stretches out into eternity?





For in a word or in the act of speech
There may play out stellar eternities
Of birth, life, and death, in search of new mouths
To be born from, to burn with, to die for.
A faint image takes shape in my head now,
Of a row of hotels along a lake.
I see them as if behind frosted glass,
Witnesses without anything to say
Standing in the haze of their unknowing,
On the last day of a millennium.




I was working in one of those hotels
As a dishwasher in a restaurant.
I found the view there suited for watching
A new world unfold without the modern
Failings of which I so often complain.
Of course no sensational freedom came,
So there and then I began my study
Of civilization, astrophysics,
And the power of positive thinking.
It took me years, but I found an answer.




June 21, 2012






So long I'd knelt before the cynic's shrine
And held my tongue, until last week, when fate
Forced me into action against my past
And perennial complaints against spring.
And now this small heart tilts with the planet.
I saw a woman in the marketplace,
Then I saw her in the vast out-of-doors,
And I knew I would never be the same.
From now on I will often be troubled.
What I thought was darkness is really light.




This was no mere frequency illusion.
Repetition is natural, but when
I saw her the first time I was reaching
For frozen food, and then, a day later,
She extended a hand to me, reaching
For my money when it meant the entrance
Fee to the park where she stood gatekeeping.
Behold, I thought, a god stronger than me
Approaches and will rule over my life.
Such beauty begets such resignation.





I am not a superstitious person,
However, as I pulled away into
Alien nature's guarded asylum,
Two birds flew side-by-side above the road:
An image of faith in a priestless place.
Before my mind's eye flashed a thousand scenes
Of the new life I might live if I were
To embrace the world's passion for action,
To find love with this person who looked up
At work from a book and into my eyes.


Some short impressions in regards to her:
Her eyes have seen the ends of endless roads
And her nice hands have hammered into place
The nails that hold all great hanging paintings.
She looks like someone who doesn't belong
To a world with words like *ammunition*.
Her voice keeps the cool mandate of a wave
Casting the moon's meaning onto a beach,
Like a genius illuminating proof.
She smiles like someone from the Isle of Man.




The mist of familiarity clears
And yields to the sweet gladness of her face.
Spring is established by her alchemy.
Summer produces sacrificial fruits
To rot in tribute to her mortal skin.
Autumn's wretched famines are merely fasts
By which nature restores austerities
Overwhelmed by the splendors of her gifts.
Winter submits to her, like a bouquet
Of plastic flowers thrown into a fire.




I thought I'd seen a friendly smile hiding
Behind the dutiful smile of her job.
Since I'd noticed no ring on her finger,
I doubled back, commanded by regret.
Both a reckless mind without a clue and
The domestic beast it was fixed into,
I had thoughts but I had no consciousness.
Still, I had seen enough television
To know I needed to couch my approach
In a plea for corrective assistance.



“Excuse me,” I said, “I just realized
That I’ll be coming back quite often and
A yearly pass would be a better deal.
May I put the one I bought toward it?”
She again flashed her overlapping smiles,
Held out a hand once more, and said, “For sure!”
I gave her my day pass and more money,
She gave me a yearlong card plus receipt.
“Also,” I spoke not knowing what I’d say,
“I wonder if you might suggest a hike?”



She tilted her head slightly to the side,
“It depends on how ambitious you are
And how much time is at your disposal.”
My ambition is without bounds, I thought,
But the world will end in twenty-nine weeks.
“Well,” I replied, “I have about four hours
And I want to see something beautiful.”
We were as two sparrows singing a song
About the work one had done which would be
The work of the other before too long.



She pointed on a map, “One and a half
Miles beyond Reflection Lake is parking
For a trail that crosses a few ridges
On the way to three small, crystal-clear ponds.”
As she spoke, her face became my frontier.
“It’s only about two miles each way, but
There’s a thousand-foot elevation gain,
So the roundtrip will take nearly two hours.
I recommend a refreshing dip if
You can stand the nearly-freezing water.”

“Thank you,” I said, “that sounds like a great plan.”
I knew that no remote place’s whispers
Or the majesty of any landscape
Could compare to the brilliance of her voice,
So I tunneled through all the Greenlandic
Winters I have imagined as layers
To hide the chrysanthemum of my soul,
And as I put the car in gear I asked,
“Would you like to go out sometime next week?”
“Call me,” she said, handing me her number.



July 21, 2012




I would critique the world and laud it too,
But I am lost in upheavals of thought
And now would rather speak of operas
Than Hell, and so I think I am in love.
Hot, tired, and nervous, I waited for her
On the bench where we had agreed to meet.
(At once in joy and fear, my head rebounds
To hear her voice in this room where I write.
It can only be love that so transforms
Emptiness into an echo chamber.)


She was running about ten minutes late
And I had forgotten the words of songs,
So I hummed while I waited for her there,
Between the sea and an aquarium.
Although nervous, I waited patiently
Where many others before me waited
In reverie for first dates or old loves.
Nearly three weeks have passed, but I clearly
Recall the shapes of clouds, and animal
Shaped shadows bathing me in cool darkness.

As time transcends those who would defy it,
One shadow that passed over me was hers,
And too in fantasy to see her approach,
I was startled by her spirited voice.
“How are you?” she asked, but who was I then?
I was a new man that very instant,
Without past or future, outside of time,
Beyond language even, without a clue,
Without mystery or reputation,
Amnestic, awake, in some distant land.


I’m sure my mouth was stupidly open,
I bet the first sounds I made were babble,
But I found myself and my voice as well.
“Oh hello I’m fine what a nice day and,”
Speaking too quickly I asked, “how are you?”
She answered “Good,” politely, with a smile.
The rest of the day was a dream of dreams,
And as it is said that in the end times
Nearly all believers’ dreams will be true,
I for once took refuge in the faithful.



As when soldiers clothe themselves in nature
To hide their resolution in a war,
That morning I chose my favorite tee,
Then, thinking it best to save such attire
For a less formal meeting, I went back
To the closet and chose an aloha
Shirt, a toucan on its heartside pocket.
I also, perhaps, wanted to evoke
A sense of honeymoons past and future,
And to seem semi-formal but still fun.




A light breeze caused the world to sway with us.
I knew the meanings of all her movements
And when I told her my favorite joke,
“A survivalist walks into a bar,”
She laughed without waiting for the punch line,
Laughter of a good person’s affection.
I felt not so much like a person as
A chord in the hollow of a guitar
Or two tones in the bell of a trumpet.
She was her two great eyes looking at me.




On that day I understood everything:
I understood floral bouquets and rings,
And musical chairs and *Leviathan*.
I understood romantic comedies
And going out for coffee and skiing
Down a slope toward a heart-shaped hot tub.
I understood children and rock 'n' roll.
I understood king-sized beds and water
With bubbles in it and Valentine's Day.
My imagination was satisfied.


By the waves we listened to each other,
Then ate some awful hotdogs on a pier,
And saw fishes at the aquarium.
She loves the jellyfish above all things.
Finally, we rode a roller coaster,
Her shoulder pressed against mine as we screamed,
And I could feel the carnival's cheap thrills
Transform into primitive metaphors
That continue to squirm about in all
My suppositions of society.



A comedian with poor memory
Becomes the only jokes he can recall
And a lonely man who dogs on love
Builds and crosses a bridge to lovelessness.
Her voice saves me in the eleventh hour,
Calling me back over that bridge I built.
To look at her is to exchange a view
For sight itself, a flashlight for the sun.
I must reframe my art and photographs
To match the fresh paint of this new world's walls.



Her mind is a fire of many colors.
Her universe is free of decadence
But full of vision and quiet longing.
She describes things as if they have
Never been repressed by culture or time.
She is against greatness in all its forms.
It's as if she knows the beauty of life
And has collected all the evidence.
I desire to be near her side always.
I can gaze at the sky and see the sky.





August 21, 2012



The mirror asks for more biography,
So I look at the dirt beneath my nails,
Trace veins in my hands, review finances,
Catalog strange phenomena I've seen,
Scrutinize the bristles of my toothbrush,
Make a list of lies I have believed in,
Tongue the places where my wisdom teeth were,
Scour my consciousness for meanings and signs,
Check the lettuce in the fridge for crispness,
And put a fresh set of sheets on the bed.

I eat a thick slice of watermelon
After every meal to aid digestion.
Occasionally I listen to Bach.
I like to take photographs of buildings,
Especially museums with concrete walls.
I have invented several card games.
Sometimes I do pushups until I can't.
In the evening I practice algebra.
I try to get to sleep before midnight.
The world wonders how as I question why.

No intervallic void between two times,
You could wake up one morning to find yourself
On the periphery of your own life,
And it may even seem like a good thing:
Perhaps your powers of observation
Will be heightened and you will notice all
The leaves on every tree in the forest,
But then you'll read Rilke's poem about
A panther, and the magnificent cat
Pacing its cage will resemble your soul.


Walking your path in someone else's shoes
Is never nearly as bad as walking
Someone else's path in shoes they sold you.
While my countrymen sweat and grunt in pain
On exercise machines so they can eat
An extra piece of birthday cake, I stroll
Down the sidewalk reciting tragedies
By men whose names have come to mean England
About en masse descents into madness.
What's the point of living a refined life?

I think of clouds as gangsters and artists
As teenagers who live for portraiture,
Who prefer Asia's fame to Phoebe's light.
But I am dwelling too much on others.
I have promised to write about my life:
There once was a poor and bitter young man
Without friends or family, who defined
Himself by what he lacked, full of envy
And malice, but also born a dreamer.
His invisibility redeemed him.


Then, perhaps too late, he solved the puzzle
Of the world, which of course meant it would end.
After that, ever so belatedly,
He solved the problem of his loneliness,
Which complicated the first solution.
Love is the enemy of the lover.
He played the blues on a ukulele
As tears of joy streamed down his sallow face.
He tried to make a gift of his heartache
But he misunderstood the symbolism.

Now, in the darkened hamlet a voice sings
A vigil of ordinary folk songs,
Horses shift uneasily in stables,
A cloud passes before the quarter moon.
Here, the townsfolk distrust all outsiders,
Who hire strangers to castrate animals,
Who smile when they feel uncomfortable,
Who wear clothes that smell of smoke and prison.
This is the beginning of a story
That ends differently with each telling.


How hard the man tries to become a man.
Our hero would like to jump off a bridge
But fears his life too slight to make a splash.
How hard the man tries to become a man.
On the roof he keeps pigeons, in his head
He calculates his body's weight as ash.
How hard the man tries to become a man.
His heart beats, *thump, ugh*, as he imagines
The price of a new car after a crash.
How hard the man tries to become a man.



The world's a bubble and he's a needle.
What can pass through the eye of a needle?
He's a needle and his eye's the needle's.
Can a needle pass through a needle's eye?
He's a needle that cannot see its point.
He's a bubble full of expectation.
Is a bubble more or less than nothing?
He's a bubble and his breath's the bubble's.
Where does a bubble go after it bursts?
The world's a needle and he's a bubble.



All he wants for Christmas is a green sponge,
To read the news with someone else's eyes.
What he gets instead is a glass of milk
And a Pasteur pipette full of duck's blood.
He adds a drop of the blood to the milk
And watches their two-liquid concerto.
The bay is cloaked in a conspiracy
Of fog that makes him miss the snows of youth.
Let it be said he has an honest mind,
If not the faculties to know the truth.





FINAL THIRD

*The sea is no less beautiful to our eyes because
we know that ships sometimes sink.*

— SIMONE WEIL




September 21, 2012




As the best actors move on from TV
And leave shows in shambles, viewers bereft,
And characters to death or surgery,
So do I move beyond my yesterdays
Into a new life, an acropolis
So perfect it seems built to be ruined.
Like a swimming pool at noon in summer
The future waits coolly to be entered,
But disturbances of satisfaction
Can overwhelm the impulse of the act.


There are plants that die from too much water,
Some things are meant to merely be observed
And others are born to be suppliant.
I reach out for love without knowing if
To love means bliss or merely drunkenness.
There are plans that vanish in their planning
And dreamers that drown in their ambition.
I doubt my senses, I hear smells, I see
Symbols wherever images should be:
A sunbow's arc above a waterfall.



As yet the beachcomber in me believes
That beneath the proof of dirt is payment
For the labor of creation, or love,
Maybe not the gold doubloon, but a shell
With the ocean where a creature should be.
For the first time, you hear your lover's voice
Singing a language you don't understand,
And the words you once knew lose their meanings.
I am so confused by this new feeling,
My greatest fear is I will outlive it.



Everything seems to be going well, but
Who knows well when less is nowhere near?
There is such a thing as a perfect storm,
When all the elements of misfortune
Converge to produce a great disaster.
One of the elements must be belief,
The others should be time and sacrifice,
And they descend on a decent person
Who stands beside some mean, magnetic soul
To hide their darkness in another's glow.



I am anxious because my life is good
And I will love a world I did destroy,
Just as rotten personas made in hate
Transubstantiate in the tendency
Of burning to offer upward its ash.
While my sweetheart works overtime this week
I have spent my hours alone dismantling
The appalling device in my basement,
But as I pull it apart it mocks me,
Knowing as I do it has done its work.

Millions of miles away, death from above
Speeds through the solar system, approaching
The planet where Mahler wrote his music.
It will be a defunct truth that kills me
And the sight of a serpent in the sky
Will be the final sign the condemned see.
If only I had despised the winter
Instead of the cold itself, I could have
Found some relief in fashion and designed
Warm jackets instead of a burning crown.

One must be well acquainted with the charms
Of decorative dishes and warm pies
To know the power that a caterwaul
At midnight may have over someone lost
In chapter nine of *Pride and Prejudice*,
In which Darcy and Elizabeth speak
Of poetry's relationship to sex.
Everyone knows what happens in the end,
But the end is just a catastrophe,
The good bits are in the complication.

Aristotle can be hard to follow
But tragedy is simplified in love.
At first, one seems to look at a stranger
In a mirror, and life is love reversed,
Then their reflection proves insubstantial
For conversations and convergences.
I am at this moment in my story
And have no idea how it will feel
To arrive with another at a shrine
With meanings both joyous and saturnine.

The other day I went out for pizza
With the woman who holds my hand in hers,
And the roads of our hunger there diverged.
We ordered a large half-mushroom, half-cheese,
So we could our own ways together go,
But by the time the waiter brought our food
We had forgotten who once wanted what
And feasted without discrimination.
The desire to know each other's desire
Did overwhelm the knowledge of one's own.

Transcendent moments become memories
Like everything else, and maybe that is
An error in the making of the world.
What if evolution's fundamental
Force were not endurance, but amazement?
Or what if everything already runs
Zigzag toward heaven and I am wrong?
What if a giraffe stretches out its neck
Seeking not fulfillment but pleasing form,
And nature is guided by beauty's voice?



October 21, 2012




I put my contraption back together
Today, because I want to show my friend
The clever elements of its design.
If she asks what it is, I'll say sculpture.
We'll talk about our favorite museums.
She is interested in art and knows
Her way through the hallways of its palace.
We may talk about Robert Rauschenberg's
Animals in *Monogram* and *Canyon*,
How he got the goat, the eagle's problems.


We'll speak of the lions in Rousseau's *Dream*
And Masahisa Fukase's ravens.
I'll ask, "Are we animals lost in art?"
She'll look at me with the pools of Heshbon
And tell me that we are only water,
And I'll profess my love like a frat boy
Braggs about how fast he can chug a beer,
And together we'll emerge from the wild
Into a garden's ordered pethidine,
As the built world becomes rich soil once more.

I'll call my device *The Prayer* as a joke.
When she sees it she will see our purity.
Language and art are machines for healing
The most painful aspects of creation.
As language would ask that we look closely,
Art may invite us to look somewhere else,
And we need its objects of affliction
To draw an audience into a space,
To blur the subtle fields of color that
Hold the methods of our understanding.


The first marks of value people made were
Signs to show where food or danger could be,
From which developed language and painting,
Both full of satisfaction and alarm.
Conversations in art and poetry
Are built on such simple propositions
As herd of buffalo hereby passes
Or child carried away by hyena.
Romance is just a metaphor for food
Like action is a metaphor for fear.




I remember the first time I made art.
I was sitting at a table not long
After I arrived at the orphanage
And a nun gave us a box of crayons.
I had never seen such a thing before.
I could form the colors of a prism
Into the shapes of things I'd never seen.
A bully took all my colors but white.
I didn't care because white could hide all
The other colors behind its façade.




I thought of the white paper as heaven
And I decorated it with white clouds
And a white sun that shone down in white rays.
The other children laughed at my picture.
Even the artistic nun dismissed it
Without asking for an explanation.
I felt I had invented a mirror
That reflected the secrets of my soul,
But like my soul would remain unexplained
Until someone with subtlety arrived.







Now the sky is littered with satellites
And all our metaphysical postcards,
Our autobiographies and pretexts,
Watch over us and cannot look away,
Like sleepy objects in a sunny room.
Perhaps there is still space in heaven for
A watcher fashioned from disputation.
Napoleon ignored the fortresses,
And maybe our creator ignores us
To occupy the space around our pain.




There are countless maps of the world, but where
Is the map that charts the art of viewing?
That would draw lines between states and meanings,
To step forward like a cartographer
And speak plainly of how a map is made?
Is my world a crowded subway platform
And my love an express train speeding by?
Is my life a series of strange letters
And hers a sentence apprehensible
In the wake of an opportunity?






There are many reasons for abstraction,
But I'm beginning to doubt the modern
Angels of post-Nietzschean persuasion
That light up the sky over Iceland or
Perplex civilization by wrapping
An imperial diet in fabric.
Where are the grand gestures of surrender
That once lent the world beauty and meaning?
Paint me a picture of a summer's day
That's warm like a fire and I'll be happy.



Walk with me uphill both ways in the snow
From cradle to grave across the country
Dragging a sack of stones and I'll believe
That an artwork can still be made from life,
That a life can have meaning in our time.
I'm only a stretcher of canvases,
A man in love at the end of the world,
Full of questions better left unanswered.
What if nature made its spices for us?
Who has teleological power?





November 21, 2012




Dark secrets should be shared by candlelight,
So I took my love to a restaurant
With a French name and authentic waiters
(By *authentic* I mean they knew waiting).
I wanted to speak of comets and fire,
Of prophecy and mankind's evil ways.
"There is mortality to romancing,"
I began, but she took it as a joke
And when she laughed my will was broken and
Like a believer, I fell to my knees.


"Time goes fast," I went on, "perhaps too fast
For a life to be lived in loneliness."
Although my face was freshly shaved, I meant
My eyes to show how deeply I could brood.
"It is the year of the apocalypse
Adaptation: movie, book, album, drink,"
I said, "but all other signs point toward
An eternity of youthful visions,"
My voice unexpectedly continued,
"And I wonder if you would marry me."

Somehow she saw beyond what I myself
Couldn't see within, where she was looking.
I was a single moment happening
And she knew all times after and before.
She shifted subtly in her seat and said
"Yes, I would happily give you my hand,"
By which she meant she'd help me stand back up
And also join me in matrimony.
*Die Sternenwelt wird zerfließen / Zum goldnen
Lebenswein / Wir werden sie genießen . . .*


Now a secret that everybody knows:
The stars shine simply because they want to.
Fish desired to walk on land, so they did.
If people wanted it badly enough,
They would evolve into wingèd angels
And make a heaven of this lowly earth,
But social development is constrained
By immediate and selfish concerns.
I've concluded that desire has prevailed
Over other means that bring together.



In human beings want has gone crazy.
I now accept this as a fact of life,
A feature of our miseducation,
An illustration of the heart's genius.
The heart, whose fire can burn a book before
It is written, whose small declinations
Can make a student into a thinker,
A bank teller into a bank robber,
A painter into a mountain climber,
A question into a revolution.



“But there is something I have to tell you,”
She continued as ecstatic tears filled
My eyes and ran in rivers down my cheeks,
Taking with them all the salt from the sea
Of misanthropy that had filled my past.
There was a long pause, during which I thought
Of what it was she needed me to know.
Perhaps she had an answer to one of
The strange questions we dreamed up together
While lying in the grass beneath the sky.



Is the heart merely a solarium?
Is the mouth, which can still speak while eating,
Just a cave where sense becomes sensation?
Did hands descend from beleaguered insects?
What can be told from an elbow's angle?
Do bodies spin to undetermined chords?
Does time advance like a fog through the woods
To surround the small cabins of each day?
Is there anything sadder than paying
For a funeral with a credit card?

"I am an agent of the government.
My bosses believe you are dangerous
And I will be obliged to arrest you."
My first thought was that the National Park
Service is part of the Department of
The Interior, but I couldn't make
The necessary connections and she
Must have seen the confusion in my eyes.
"I'm on a terrorism task force and
We've been watching you for about twelve months."

Ouch is one way to describe how I felt,
Although it perhaps does not quite capture
The sting of having one's life upended
Or the waves of bad feeling issued from
A ship heading to an island prison.
But I was a changed man and chose to fix
My attention on what was positive
About the situation, namely that
She had agreed to get married to me.
"I'm so happy, I cannot find the words."

We continued the date at an open
Mic night at our favorite coffee shop.
I read ten haiku about falling flowers,
Prefaced by the Japanese saying that
"Only a flower that falls is complete."
She read passages from my diary.
Afterwards, we ate pizza for desert
Then went to a bar for karaoke
With some friends of hers from the FBI.
She sang "Hey Jude" as they arrested me.




December 21, 2012




The same judge that married us sentenced me
To an unspecified number of years.
In prisons there are many diversions
And in asylums there are even more.
My sanctuary is populated
By chess players, poets, postal workers,
Architects who wanted to be artists,
Mathematicians, psychoanalysts'
Children, artists who tried to make money,
And frozen yogurt impresarios.


In French the word for junk is *camelote*
And a peddler is called a *camelot*,
Is something I learned from a Belgian priest
Who is quickly becoming my best friend.
One of the orderlies whispered to me
That he's not really Belgian or a priest,
That Pierre had been a banker named Frank,
But who am I to judge him by his past
If his knowledge of traditional beer
Brewing techniques eludes superlatives?



At lunch I overheard an oracle
Named Hatoon describe the lifetime of night.
“As I walked from downtown under the Moon,”
She said, “death sleepwalked beside me, its dreams
Like living circles without walls or light.
We are born into the military.”
Her bright eyes were reflected in the sneeze
Guard’s tempered glass, transforming instant mashed
Potatoes into clouds or hungry ghosts.
I found out that she had been a scholar.




There is a patient whose anger reminds
Me of my own when I was a youngster.
“What moves me to defile this emptiness
With the brutal joys of observation
Is my realization that through simple
Schoolhouse lessons I may discover how
To end the agony of Time’s power
By cutting out the eyes of our planet
With a mathematical lullaby,”
He told me while we played table tennis.




Sometimes there are structured activities.
“I’m just not that into plasma,” I heard
A man say at a poetry reading.
I wasn’t sure of which plasma he spoke:
The sort that travels with life through our veins,
Or the fundamental state of matter,
The super gas in stars and neon signs,
Or maybe the word itself in language,
Maybe it is a poetry movement,
Or something else, beyond my mind’s limits.


An improv troupe came but was booed off stage
Because jokes are not for locked-up people,
Who in our dreams can never open doors,
Who pass the party hours on terraces
Crying into empty plastic glasses,
Eyes swollen beneath the moon’s asbestos,
Who receive our lives in cardboard mailers,
Who bathe in boots made of alligators,
Who have lost sight of both ship and ocean.
Knock-knock jokes are not for unfree people.



I mostly sit in my padded walnut
(I know it's not a walnut, that's a joke),
Wearing a false brow and a common crown
(I know my brow is real and the crown fake),
Meditating on what the world has done
To dreamers and to the dreams of dreamers,
On heavenly signs and fearful people,
On the symbolism of blue flowers,
On the words that comprise death sentences,
And the sentences that compose a life.



More than anything else I imagine
My wife, who visits whenever she can.
As rehearsals become reenactments,
Time passes to kill everything without
Its face, a mirror made of bits of sand,
But there is a chance that my machine did
Not mean to summon a comet, rather
It was meant to bring us two together,
An envoy who arrived to dedicate
A calendar to days, time to living.



Then I worry that in fact my machine
Has done the job for which it was fashioned
And we stand in the ruins of an age
Defined mostly by its final moments.
I read somewhere that if a statue's head
Is overly big and the feet are too small,
It is called *parody* not *effigy*,
And there is such a statue in the yard,
Visible from the window of my cell,
In a fountain like the one at Versailles.

This is the last of five unlucky days,
The time of my prophecy is at hand,
And I heard, on the radio, mention
Of an asteroid approaching the Earth,
So I asked the orderly in charge if
I could sit in this cold garden to write.
Now I watch the sky with apprehension
As the future approaches or retreats.
Tomorrow is visitation day and
I don't believe in endings anymore.







Fugitive Pieces



Astronomy is no consolation.

The future cannot live in the present.

Love begins as dream and ends as rumor.

The herd abstracts the individual.

Where we are is no there but in leaving.

Civilization began in a gourd.

If born on the vine, best to die as wine.

Poetry is a loud vow of silence.

The rich have nice tombstones but share our dirt.

Eternity is a senseless flower.

Memory encircles the sleepless past.

Distance always subordinates the truth.

The sound of a gull falling from the air.

People of conviction are never free.

Dialectical days, romantic nights.

Only small islands are largely themselves.

In the sea, on the snow, the lovely sun.

Mortality salience dizzies death.

The older the steel, the quicker the cut.

How eyes of love see Egypt from above.

Contradiction develops in exchange.

History shatters thought against language.

The navel is where *self* means the *other*.

For a nation, the world is abandoned.

A crucifix should weigh three hundred pounds.
Genius and madness share the same tower.
Trained monsters are the most monstrous monsters.
A dream's doing draws and quarters its heart.
From the state's soft pipes gush the oils of war.
Darkness can only be seen from outside.
A survivor is one who tortures death.
Too familiar or success as failure.
People never weep bitterly these days.
History teaches history teachers.
At midnight, the spine of daytime erupts.
Freedom must begin with vulgarity.

Philosophies are the hangnails of thought.

Workers are teeth in a teeth-grinding world.

Envy is the ultimate addiction.

You can reject a thing and love it too.

Love is a heaven too easily moved.

In pain, ownership is demystified.

Property vomited monogamy.

Count the times you feel free, divide by two.

Beware of the priest with only one ear.

The stars shed their light as darkness gathers.

To hunt something is to beg it to flee.

Never relinquish more than one delight.



Every home hides a drawer full of knives.

Child's play, mushroom clouds, strategy, and kings.

Bird's nest, spider's web, mankind's endless wars.

Make of the dead a living vehicle.

Hope cranes its neck to have its head cut off.

Will is a function of naïveté.



The stars are around us, not up above.



The observer's failure is called vision.

The world is post-unintelligible.

Alienation belongs to us all.

Peace means turning around to face the wall.

Affection is a kind of furnishing.

The soul hangs between lust and emptiness.

Through poverty desire becomes darkness.

Government: a bridle on a dead horse.

Breath dizzies air in the esophagus.

A monk prays, God slips on a banana.

All the best guard dogs bite before they bark.

Ambition is not imagination.

Terror translates landscape into frontier.

For the planet, volcano is a verb.

Posterity: a pile of bloody wreaths.

Dying is treason against the body.

Winter is a river, spring is a vault.

A stone bench beneath a tattered banner.

Only to aardvarks are elephants gods.

Beauty and power strike the same poses.

Speaking alone, the words like a kind soul.

When music plays, the body grinds its grist.

Real estate, traffic, and relationships.

Tragedy can fold fingers into fists.

Ecstasy may express love's disclosures.


Torment wears a mask of inanity.

Laughter in the bath, tears at sea, depth hurts.

What to look for, looking in the mirror.

Music haunts the house of meaningfulness.

Religion unearths the arts of despair.
Shards of shattered glass or the world as-is.
As long as zoos exist, we can't be free.
Age humbles even the cruelest genius.
The carnivore worships the cannibal.
It rains until the cistern fills with life.
Each new argument ages a person.
The wind in the trees, a Dorian mood.
Broken glass after the after party.
Language like a houseplant in a motel.
To dream is to brace oneself against death.
Spring's sweetness and the feast of its offices.





Skepticism gave birth to consciousness.

Beauty's shadow is unspeakably dark.

Silk abstracted the flesh from history.

Escape nostalgia by moving closer.





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